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Luke 24:36-48

PROOF OF LIFE

When you are handed something you find hard to believe, it is not unusual to want to see proof--the photos, the documents, the newspaper article or other evidence that will prove what seems to be too unbelievable. Dead men don't come back to life. It was too unbelievable to imagine that someone who was crucified, buried, and lay decomposing in a tomb for three days could be alive. When Jesus appeared among the disciples on the Sunday evening of what we now call Easter, it is easy to understand why the disciples were startled and thought he was a ghost. What Jesus offers his disciples is proof that he was not a deathly apparition, but in fact, that he was fully alive. He invites his friends to touch his hands and feet--to feel his body and see for themselves that he was made up of bones and flesh. Ghosts do not have solid bodies. And then Jesus asks for something to eat and snacks on a piece of fish--further evidence that he was indeed alive because ghosts don't have bodies and don't need to eat.

Jesus takes these efforts to prove that he is not a ghost not only to calm his disciples down; after all, seeing a ghost would be an understandably frightening experience. Jesus takes the time to prove he is not a ghost for other important reasons. You see, ghosts are apparitions that still lie in the clutches of death. Ghosts are deathly creatures--creatures who belong to the realm of death. But in the Resurrection, the God of life had fully, completely triumphed over death. Jesus wants his friends to understand that in gazing upon him, they were witnesses to God's victory over death. So Jesus stood among them and offered them proof that he was alive, with a solid body, with a need to eat. The Resurrection meant that Jesus was fully and completely alive.

But what about us? It is now three weeks since Easter. But what proof can we offer that we are fully alive? We may eat and we may drink and we may have solid bodies, but there is more to being alive than just eating or drinking or walking around. Could anyone looking at our lives see any proof that the Resurrection has taken place? Or do we still lie in the clutches of death?

This is the question we are faced with three weeks after Easter: are you alive?
Are you alive or are you just going through the motions of living each day?
Can the Resurrected life be found in you or are you preoccupied with the never-ending race to get more, be more, have more?

Are you alive or are you carrying around anger and resentment in your heart?

Are you alive or is much of your life simply trying to avoid the inconveniences of someone asking something of you?

Are you alive or do you still feel as though you are unworthy of love or acceptance?

Are you alive or do the suffering and needs of the world paralyze you?

Are you alive or are you stuck in old habits, old attitudes, old ways of behaving that have not been very life-giving but to which you still cling out of familiarity?

Are you alive or do you hang on to what you have for fear of having less?

Are you alive or does fear keep you from taking on something new?

Are you alive or are you weighed down and guilt-ridden by your past?

Are you alive or have you accepted that there is nothing more you can expect from this one wild and precious life you have been given than passing a few decades acquiring and consuming and accommodating yourself to boredom?

And what about us all together? Are *we* alive or are we only interested in managing a building and worrying about declining membership numbers?

Are we alive to the good news that God loves us, forgives us, calls us and empowers us to offer our precious lives and our resources to join in the work of God's kingdom?

What proof of life could any one witness in your life or in mine?

Jesus lived and Jesus died and Jesus rose so that you and I might have life and have it abundantly--not partial life or moderate life, but abundant life. We have mistakenly thought that abundant life can be found in the abundance of material goods, in big houses, in lucrative careers, in nice clothes, in great electronic gadgets, in exotic vacations. But as we in our culture have pursued these things, we have become more and more ghost-like. We've become apparitions who *resemble* living beings but who are really in the clutches of death. The Resurrection is God's effort to make us fully alive, to conquer those things that bring death to us, and to set us free to really live.

Jesus gives us two clues in this Easter evening story about what can help us become truly alive. He instructs his disciples that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations." Proof that we have been made alive is found when we repent and when we accept the forgiveness of sins.

Repentance strikes us as such an old fashioned word and concept. But really all that repentance means is turning away from who and what we have been and turning our lives toward God. If we resist repentance, if we refuse to repent of attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles, we are holding on to the ways of death, to the tomb, and resisting the new life God makes possible. I don't know what you might need to repent of--but we all need to repent, usually every day. We all need to turn away from death and toward God.

Among the many things we might need to repent of, the problem of *stinginess* strikes me as a significant issue for people in our society. The irony is that compared to much of the world, we have so much, but at the same time, we have grown stingy with our hearts, our resources, our welcome of the stranger, our time. And often our stinginess has become so normalized we don't even recognize it as a problem.

When our family traveled to Tanzania nearly a year ago, we spent a lot of time with a man named Godrick and his wife Edda. They were not wealthy people by any means. But they constantly seemed to live out a spirit of generosity. They brought into their small home to live with them and their children, several other people, not relatives, who were in need. They opened their home and these people lived with them. They helped to pay for the education of some other children from their congregation. They gave their money to help pay for people's medical expenses. And all this was done from a deep faith commitment and a spirit of joyful giving. They gave and gave and found blessings in giving.

What if we repented of our stinginess and each day endeavored to give our lives away? To give away our hearts and give away our love with reckless abandon--even to those who seem ungrateful or undeserving. To give away our forgiveness to those who have hurt us--to give it away abundantly. To give our money and our possessions to benefit others. To give our time and our efforts for others. And to do so with joyful generosity. Imagine rising each day with the mission of giving ourselves away. We wonder if we might begin to discover a new kind of aliveness within us. What are we holding back for? What are we preserving our lives for?

The other proof of being alive according to our story today is in accepting God's forgiveness of sin. If we cannot accept God's forgiveness, we will be held back in the tomb of our guilt and shame and disgrace. But God's grace is offered to us daily that we might be made

alive. Every one of us needs God's grace in order to be alive. And God gives it to us with abundant generosity.

Jesus tells us in this story that we are to witness to the Resurrection, to the new life God makes possible through repentance and the forgiveness of sins. With so much death everywhere around us--from wars and crime and spiritual emptiness--the world needs to see proof of life. And Jesus looks to you and me and says to us, "Show them."